

The background features a stylized sun in shades of yellow and orange, partially obscured by various leafy branches in brown, black, and blue tones. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, greens, and browns.

# **AFRICAN AMERICANS IN WESTFIELD, NEW JERSEY FROM 1720 - 2020**

*includes a map, timeline, and walking tour*

**AFRICAN AMERICANS**  
**IN**  
**WESTFIELD, NEW JERSEY**  
**FROM**  
**1720 ~ 2020**

*... from enslavement to present day*

**A project of Westfield 300 – celebrating  
300 years of Westfield, New Jersey**



**presented by Valley Bank**

## Foreward

Throughout 2020, the Westfield 300 initiative has commemorated the 300th anniversary of our settlement through a variety of events and programming. An important part of this effort is to reflect on our Town's history, and I'm thrilled to see the contributions of the African American community documented for all to explore and appreciate. I invite all residents to take in and celebrate the richness and diversity of the African American experience in Westfield.



Mayor Shelley Brindle

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**Photo credits:** See inside back cover

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## Introduction

People of African descent have contributed richly to the community of Westfield throughout its 300-year history. This booklet covers a sampling of those contributions.

Our walking tour covers several milestone places of significance to the African American experience in Westfield, from the Colonial period of enslavement to the declaration of a potential realizable achievement of justice for all, as espoused by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Included in this booklet is a timeline that identifies important national events that impacted all African Americans and juxtaposes them with local events that were significant in our community. The timeline includes the periods after emancipation – Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and, the Civil Rights era. Along the way, the tour touches on some important contributors to the Harlem Renaissance and the institutions (both spiritual and secular) that gave strength, hope, and sustenance to the African American community in Westfield. An interactive version of the timeline, with more in depth descriptive material, is available at: [time.graphics/line/399475](https://time.graphics/line/399475).

Please refer to the tour map on the back cover. This walking tour is also available on the location-driven interactive history map website and mobile application, **The Clio**. You can follow the tour by downloading the app, (search for “The Clio” in your app store), and then searching for *African American History in Westfield Walking Tour*, or by accessing the tour on the Clio website at: [www.theclio.com/tour/1585](http://www.theclio.com/tour/1585). Note that sites numbered 1 through 11 are most likely “walk-able,” whereas sites numbered 12, 13, and 14 are further out and would be most easily reached by car.

### ***In the beginning ...***

In the New York Times *1619 Project*, Nikole Hannah-Jones writes that “out of slavery ... grew nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional.” As we celebrate Westfield’s 300th year, we have a keen opportunity to acknowledge the history of African Americans in this town, tracing their contributions, from those that have been unheralded to the remarkable accomplishments recognized nationally. It is a history that is not often taught, but it is a history that is an integral part of Westfield’s story.

One hundred years ago, in 1920, when Westfield celebrated its 200th anniversary, it presented a grand, all-day pageant in Mindowaskin Park representing the historical milestones of the town from 1720 to 1920. The history of the Lenape was represented in one of the parades, but the word “slavery” or any mention of African American history was noticeably omitted. The existence of slaves in Westfield, however, along with the remarkable contributions and resilience of African Americans, is very much a part of the colonial history of Westfield.

Now, in 2020, one hundred years later, let us trace the 300-year journey of African Americans in Westfield on this walking tour. In so doing, we will uncover what has been hidden from us and like archeologists uncovering a lost civilization, we will bring this story to light.

It is likely that African Americans lived in New Jersey before the 1660s, but the exact date when enslaved people arrived is unknown. We do know that African Americans were part of the lives of the early settlers here.

## Site No. 1

### Burial Grounds of the Presbyterian Church – 140 Mountain Avenue



The Burial Grounds of the Presbyterian Church was designated in 1720, about the same time that the West Fields of Elizabeth was settled as a village. Early on, the Burial Grounds was a community cemetery and all residents of Westfield would have been eligible for burial here; there were no restrictions based on race or ethnicity according to the church Cemetery Committee.

Rev. Woodruff, minister of the Presbyterian Church during this early period, was buried in the cemetery where you are standing. He owned slaves and married off one of his slaves to an enslaved person owned by Dr. Elmer, also of Westfield.

Although no markers have been found that identify African American burial locations in this cemetery, L. Wallace Brown, an African American man born in Westfield in 1931 remembers visiting his grandmother's grave here, which did not have a grave stone. Mr. Brown's family bible traces his ancestors back to Lemby Williams, who was born in 1792 and was a member of the Presbyterian Church, and John C. Williams, who was born in 1795. Remarkably, Mr. Brown is a living representative of very early African American residents of our town who trace their lineage to colonial times.



Entry gate to the Burial Grounds



L. Wallace Brown visiting the site he remembers as his grandmother's grave

## Site No. 2 Slave Auction Site – Downtown Westfield



Possible area of slave auction site



Slaves were bought and sold in Westfield in the 18th and early 19th centuries, although the exact location of the auction site is unknown, it was most likely in this central downtown area, possibly at Lincoln Plaza according to local folklore. In 1780 there were 25 enslaved people living in Westfield, more than the number of houses reported in town and the Westfield Historical Society documents that slaves were openly traded on the streets of Westfield in 1813. Westfield's wealthiest families, including the Cory, Elmer, and Ross families, all owned slaves in 1830.

In 1757 Westfield resident Cornelius Hetfield advertised for sale (in a slave auction in Elizabeth) a “likely parcel of negro boys and girls from 12-20 years of age who have had small pox.” Implicit in this ad is the cruel separation of enslaved children from their parents. Laws in place at the time broke up families and prohibited enslaved people from visiting family in other states. The laws enacted separate regulations with more severe punishments for African Americans and prevented African Americans from meeting and holding property.

New Jersey newspapers of the day were filled with advertisements for slave auctions as well as ads searching for runaway slaves, in fact there were some 1500 such advertisements from 1715-1781. Most runaway slaves in New Jersey were men with an average age of 27 and were often described by their particular skills, such as: tanner, skinner, tailor, carpenter, millwright, cooper, baker, brickmaker, musician, and shoemaker. This was a change from the earlier decades in which most slaves were described as farmers or field hands.

There were numerous slave insurrections in New Jersey in the second half of the 18th century, including in Somerville in 1734, in Hackensack (1741), in Perth Amboy (1772), and in Elizabethtown in 1779. In fact, at this time New Jersey had the second highest number of slaves of any colony north of Maryland (New York was first). After a major slave rebellion in New York City in 1741, fears of a similar incident in Elizabethtown led to fourteen slaves being burned at the stake and eighteen being hanged. Although the names of those slaves killed were not recorded, the names of the men who provided the wood for the fires was recorded along with the amount they were paid for that wood by the Elizabethtown freeholders.

By the time of the 1830 census, there were 19 slaves and 134 free African Americans living in Westfield. John Williams, born in Westfield in 1795 and living on Clark Street, was one of those free men. Mr. Williams was Wallace Brown's great, great, grandfather, listed in Mr. Brown's family bible. It is unclear whether John Williams was born free, which was a possibility if a parent had served in the Revolutionary War, or if he escaped bondage or was rewarded with his freedom in some other way. At any rate, John Williams owned property worth \$200, which is notable since for many years African Americans (enslaved or freed) were not permitted to own property. He was most likely an apprentice or servant.

### Site No. 3

#### Bethel Baptist Church – 539 Trinity Place



Bethel Baptist Church, on the right

In 1889 a large population of African Americans arrived in Westfield from Virginia. The group needed a place to worship and to find fellowship so they approached and were accepted into the fellowship of the First Baptist Church of Westfield, the only Baptist church in town.

The southern Black Baptists stayed for a while but soon realized that they needed a separate building. The First Baptist Church donated the land for the church on September 21, 1889, the church was built, and the land was held in trust by the First Baptist Church. Originally the church's name was New York Avenue Baptist Church, but this was changed to Bethel Baptist Church in 1913.

Over the years Bethel Baptist has played an important role in the African American community in Westfield and in 1988 hosted the first annual town-wide celebration of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The current pastor of Bethel Baptist Church is the Rev. Kevin Clark, who succeeded the Rev. Miles Austin, an original founder of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Westfield.

### Site No. 4

#### Robeson Memorial Park – Corner of Rahway Ave. & Watterson St.



Robeson Park was dedicated by Westfield town officials and members of the Paul Robeson Centennial Committee (PRCC) of Westfield on July 10, 2007. The park commemorates the contributions of the Robeson family to the town of Westfield, the State of New Jersey, and the countries of the world, and was the culmination of efforts by the PRCC that began in 1998 as the town acknowledged the centennial year of Paul Robeson's birthday. The PRCC planned and executed a Westfield community celebration that included activities from April 5 – 11, 1998.

After Reverend William Drew Robeson lost his wife to a home fire when Paul was six years old, he and his son (the rest of the children were away at school) moved from Princeton to Westfield in 1907. Here he established St. Luke's AME Zion Church on the corner of Osborn and Downer Streets (Site No. 10). The family (William and Paul) moved to Somerville, NJ in 1910.

Paul Robeson's education from ages 9-12 (grades 5-7) was in Westfield where he was an outstanding student and athlete. He graduated from high school in Somerville and enrolled in Rutgers College in 1915. He graduated from Rutgers as a premier athlete, scholar, and orator and was its first All-American in football. He became world famous as an actor, orator, singer, humanitarian, and social activist. He spoke forcefully and courageously against racism and social injustices.



Paul Robeson, 1942



Paul Robeson Centennial Committee at Dedication of Robeson Memorial Park, 2007. Donnell Carr, Lenore Scurry, Carol LaPierre, Patricia Faggins, Giles Wright, Andrew H. Lee, Rev. Robert Taylor, Rev. Leon Randall.

## Site No. 5

### Zora Neale Hurston Residence – 405 West Broad Street

Zora Neale Hurston was born in Notasulga, Alabama in 1891. In 1894 her family moved to Eatonville, Florida, where she grew up. After her primary education she studied at Morgan Academy (now Morgan University) in Baltimore, then briefly at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and finally at Barnard College in New York City, where she finished her undergraduate studies at the age of 27. Ms. Hurston became an accomplished author, anthropologist, and film maker and was considered by W.E.B. Dubois to be one of the Talented Tenth. She, like her contemporary Langston Hughes, was an important contributor to the Harlem Renaissance (1920s to early 1930s – see page 28). Zora Hurston was the leading black woman novelist during this period.

Around 1930 Ms. Hurston moved to Westfield while collaborating with Langston Hughes on a play for Broadway called *Mule Bone*, which was based on the story *The Bone of Contention*. After a dispute with Mr. Hughes, she left Westfield and moved to Manhattan in April, 1931.

One interesting aspect of Hurston's life was that she was viewed by many of her colleagues and associates as the most conservative black person in the art world; not prone to being politically correct in her writings and storytelling.

#### Notable Sayings by Zora Neale Hurston:

*"There are years that ask questions and years that answer."*

*"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."*

#### Notable Books:

*Tell My Horse*

*Their Eyes Were Watching God*

*Mules and Men*

*I Love Myself When I'm Laughing*



405 West Broad Street



Zora Neale Hurston

## Site No. 6

### Plinton Funeral Home – 411 West Broad Street



Plinton Curry Funeral Home, 2020

*"It Is Better to Know Us and Not Needs Us, Than to Need Us and Not Know Us."*

The Plinton Funeral Home was established in 1949 by W. Hollis Plinton (1915 - 1983), a graduate of Westfield High School. Mr. Plinton attended Boston University and the School of Embalming and Restoration after serving in World War II, for which he was the first black man drafted in Westfield. He was also the first black president of the New Jersey Funeral Directors Association. As a 7th grade student at Roosevelt Junior High School, Mr. Plinton drew the plans for his business on West Broad Street in his Mechanical Drawing class.

In comments to the Westfield Historical Society, Mr. Plinton noted that the town of Westfield had changed during his lifetime and he remembered when portions of town had board sidewalks, which would throw him off his bicycle while he was delivering papers. "I call it the days of walking back and forth downtown and you spoke to everybody downtown and you knew everybody you spoke to." He also remembered that when he left for the war "my front door was never locked," but when he came back the door had a lock on it.

Hollis Plinton was a member of the Bethel Baptist Church, served on the Board of Directors of the Westfield Community Center, and was a member of the Centennial Lodge. During his tenure as the Chairman of the Housing Committee at the Centennial Lodge, they facilitated the construction of houses on Windsor Avenue, for returning black WWII veterans. He was also active on the Westfield Recreation Commission for over twenty-two years, following in his mother's footsteps.

After his death in 1983, the Plinton Funeral Home continued to be owned and managed by his widow, Eva Holmes Plinton. Hollis Plinton was the brother of James O. Plinton, Jr. (see Black Professional Zone entry).

## Black Professional Zone (1940 - 1970)



This area of Westfield was home to black businesses and professional offices throughout the twentieth century. Many black doctors and dentists had their offices here in addition to black-owned businesses such as the Cameron Barbershop, the Braxton Pool Hall (403 West Broad St.) and two taxi companies.

**A** — *Dr. James Byrd, DDS* – 550 Trinity Place – Having been raised in Westfield and graduating from Westfield High School in 1928 (where he was a great long distance runner), Dr. Byrd attended Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. He maintained his dental practice in Westfield for over 40 years.

**B** — *Dr. Howard Brock, MD* – 413 West Broad Street – Dr. Brock was born in West Chester, PA in 1890. He attended the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and earned his medical degree at Howard University, in Washington, D.C. Dr. Brock maintained his practice in Westfield for more than 50 years and had an office in New York City until 1957.

## Black Professional Zone (1940 - 1970)

**C** — *Dr. Russell Corbin, DDS* – 432 West Broad Street – Dr. Corbin was raised in Westfield, graduating from Westfield High School in 1924. Dr. Corbin maintained his dental practice for close to 40 years.

**D** — *Dr. George H. Jones, DDS* – 450 West Broad Street – After growing up in Norlina, North Carolina, Dr. Jones earned his Doctor of Dental Surgery at Howard University and maintained a practice in Westfield for over 40 years.

**E** — *James O. Plinton, Sr. and James O. Plinton, Jr.* – 516 West Broad Street – James O. Plinton, who was born in Jamaica, West Indies, was a dental technician whose laboratory was maintained at his home. He did work for dentists from Elizabeth to Bound Brook and was the first black owner of a dental laboratory in Union County. His son, James Plinton, Jr. was born and raised in Westfield, graduating from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, and serving in the U.S. Merchant Marines. In 1941 Mr. Plinton began a 40-year career in aviation that took him from being a flight instructor for the Tuskegee Airmen, to starting air services in Ecuador and Haiti, to becoming a Vice President for TWA and Eastern Airlines. He is the brother of Hollis Plinton (see site No. 6, Plinton Funeral Home).

**F** — *Dr. Minturn Thompson, MD* – 530 West Broad Street – Dr. Thompson was a lifelong resident of Westfield who received his medical degree from Howard University College of Medicine in Washington, D.C. After his internship at Freedmen's Hospital, now the Howard University Hospital, he maintained his medical practice on West Broad Street for over 36 years.

**G** — *Dr. Robert Thompson, DDS* – 203 Palsted Avenue – Dr. Thompson was raised in Westfield and graduated from Westfield High School in 1941. He attended the College of Dentistry at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he received numerous citations and certification for his many years of public service. Dr. Thompson practiced dentistry in Westfield for over 40 years.

**H** — **Dr. Hubert Humphrey, MD** – 430 Downer Street – Dr. Humphrey was born and raised in Westfield, graduating from Westfield High School in 1927. After receiving his medical degree from the Howard University College of Medicine in 1935, and interning at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, D.C., he began his Westfield medical practice in 1936, which lasted over 33 years.

### Site No. 7

#### Elks Centennial Lodge 400 – 444 West Broad Street

The Elks Centennial Lodge 400 was organized July 28, 1923 at Shady Rest Country Club in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. The Centennial Lodge has worked in the community facilitating various humanitarian efforts including supporting children, sponsoring oratorical contests, and encouraging Black Westfield youth to pursue their education. In 1952 the Centennial Lodge sponsored a housing development on Windsor Avenue, which was a remarkably successful and notable accomplishment that resulted in the building and completion of affordable housing for returning African American WWII veterans. Mayor Charles P. Bailey and the Westfield Town Council were very supportive of this effort. In 1954, Mayor Emerson Thomas donated a nine-room house on Spring Street (now Watterson Street) for the use of the lodge, which was eventually moved to its present location at 444 West Broad Street.



### Site No. 8

#### Westfield Community Center – 558 West Broad Street



*“The Fellowship of The World Begins in One’s Community”*

An often overlooked treasure in town is the Westfield Community Center located at 558 West Broad Street. The Center has been an important and vital part of Westfield since 1935. It was formed after a group of prominent citizens – members of the Avalonte and the Mindowaskin Clubs – cooperated with the National Youth Administration to provide social and recreational activities for young people in Union County towns and started the Toy Lending Library. In addition to collecting, repairing, and lending toys to children, the library offered a full-scale recreation program and a work employment program for young men and women in the area. The toy library was renamed the Westfield Community Center Association in 1937 and the first Executive Director was Mr. Leroy Scurry, whose leadership developed the organization into a highly successful provider of social services to the Westfield community.

The center moved from its original location at 464 West Broad Street to its present location in 1941 and was formally incorporated in 1948. Federal tax exempt status was granted to the Center in 1951 and public charity status was granted in 1970. Over the years the center has operated after-school, pre-school and youth summer camp programs. Currently, the center serves senior citizens and is designated and funded by the County of Union as a senior citizens facility. In addition, in 2015, the Westfield Community Center designated a special room in the center as the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Westfield library and museum. This room is where the Dr. King Association has its regular meetings.

Over its long history, the Westfield Community Center has hosted many distinguished visitors who were invited to offer wisdom and inspiration to children and adults. Among those visitors were the baseball player Jackie Robinson, the tennis champion Althea Gibson, the Olympian Jesse Owens, and the renowned educator Mary McLeod Bethune. During the 1960s, 70s, and 80s the Center hosted fundraising events that drew the talents of Glenn Miller, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Harry James, and Woody Herman and their orchestras, as well as famous singers such as Fanni Jones. These eminent musical performances greatly enhanced the center’s image as a first class provider of community services.

## Site No. 9

### Langston Hughes Residence – 514 Downer Street

Langston Hughes (1902 – 1967) was born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902. His grandfather was killed in abolitionist John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859. Hughes lived as a boy in Lawrence, Kansas, then moving with his mother to several cities in the mid-west. During these moves he fell in love with books and decided that he wanted to be a writer. After high school he spent two years in Mexico with his father, and then, because he wanted to see Harlem, he moved to New York and entered Columbia University in 1921, leaving after a single unhappy year. He entered Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in 1925 and graduated in 1929.

Langston Hughes moved to Westfield around 1930 where he collaborated with Zora Neale Hurston on writing a play for Broadway. Hughes, like Hurston, became an important contributor to the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes moved from Westfield to NYC in 1931.

#### *I, Too*

I, too, sing America  
I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed –

I, too, am America.



514 Downer Street, 2020



Langston Hughes, 1939

## Site No. 10

### St. Luke's AME Zion Church – 500 Downer Street



St. Luke's AME Zion Church, 2020.



Rev. William Drew Robeson, 1845-1918

St. Luke's African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church came into existence in 1853, originally as part of the Quakers. In 1907, under the leadership of Reverend William Drew Robeson, the current church was constructed. St. Luke's still celebrates the birthday of its most famous son – Paul Robeson – and in April 1998, during the tenure of the late Rev. Leon Randall and Westfield's Centennial celebration of Robeson, the corner of Downer and Osborn Streets was designated Paul Robeson Corner by the Town of Westfield. The current pastor of St. Luke's is the Rev. William E. Lawson.

## Site No. 11

### Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Monument – South Avenue Circle

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Monument was erected by the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Westfield to honor Dr. King. This monument was dedicated on June 19, 2005 (“Juneteenth”) in a public celebration and now serves as a place of quiet reflection, as a rallying point for peaceful demonstrations, memorials, and vigils, and as the starting location of the march to the annual commemorative MLK Day service on the third Monday in January of every year.

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Monument was funded by the members of the Dr. King Association of Westfield, interested citizens, and The Westfield Foundation. The site for the monument was provided by the Town of Westfield.

The plaque reads:

#### ***We Are Living the Dream***

*The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Westfield and the Town of Westfield honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929 - 1968. He dedicated his life to the ongoing struggle for racial, social and economic justice through passive resistance and non-violent action. We find it fitting that Dr. King be paid lasting homage so that his life and work may continue not only to inspire us today, but for generations to come. In grateful appreciation, we dedicate this monument on this 19th day of June 2005. His dream lives on.*

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Westfield was established in the summer of 1987, when the seed of celebrating the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. germinated in the minds of five people — Rev. Theodore Calhoun, the late Rev. Miles Austin, the late Mrs. Dorothy Kirkley, Ms. Patricia Faggins, and Mr. Tyrone Laws. They were motivated to action and pooled their efforts to present the first community-wide interfaith observance of the birthday of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Bethel Baptist Church. From that time, the annual service has continued as a community celebration, is attended by hundreds each year, and is now hosted by a different Westfield house of worship annually.

Throughout these years, the Dr. King Association has worked within Westfield to keep the spirit of Dr. King alive, including organizing a town-wide Community Discussion on Race in 2016, awarding scholarships to college-bound African American students each year, holding an annual essay, art, and poetry contest in the local schools, and hosting many vigils and memorials at the monument in response to events and to continue the struggle for racial, social, and economic justice that was started by Dr. King.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Monument, 2020.



Dr. King Association at the monument dedication, 2005. L-R: Sylvia Ballatt, Elizabeth Wolf, Carol LaPierre, Patricia Faggins, Carol Molnar, Hattie Harris, Dolores Graves, LaVar Harris, William Foley, Andrew H. Lee, Julie Purnell, Donnell Carr, Rev. Leon Randall, Nathan Hollis.

## Site No. 12

### Westfield Neighborhood Council – 127 Cacciola Place



Westfield Neighborhood Council (WNC) is a private, non-profit community based social service organization located at 127 Cacciola Place. The purpose is to serve residents of the community with programs and services that enable individuals to strive with pride to reach their highest potential. These programs historically included pre-school, after-school, summer, teens, and senior citizens.

WNC started as a grassroots movement in 1967 when several women of Cacciola Place began meeting to discuss the deplorable living conditions in their neighborhood. In February 1967, the women presented their list of concerns before the Westfield Town Council and the Town responded immediately by sending trucks for a cleanup weekend. A Community Development Corporation was soon formed in Westfield, funds were raised, and a 22-unit apartment complex and two duplexes were constructed and opened in May 1971.

This grassroots movement also inspired the women to have a center in the Cacciola neighborhood to address the needs of the predominately black families. That summer, a nearby empty lot was cleared for recreational activities. The women sought guidance from county and local officials on how to start a neighborhood center. Soon, others joined them in their efforts, and they eventually were able to establish and incorporate a multi-service center in 1969.

Over the years, the WNC programs have reached children, many of whom benefitted from them for decades from preschool through adulthood. Currently the programs have been restructured utilizing mostly volunteers to offer activities for youth, adults, and senior citizens.

## Site No. 13

### Gideon Ross Estate – 231 Elizabeth Avenue

In the 1830s, according to recollections of old families in Westfield, the Gideon Ross estate had slave quarters that were still in existence until the 1920s. The 1830s tax records for Westfield indicate that there were approximately nineteen slaves in town. By 1840 that number was down to four slaves and by 1850 only one person remained enslaved in Westfield.

Looking at slave codes to get a sense of life as a slave in Westfield, we learn that the 1704 New Jersey Slave Code banned buying or selling goods to enslaved people and punished them if they were more than ten miles from their master's home. Later the slave code "banned freed slaves and their children from holding property, effectively denying them the right to vote or hold office." (see Geneva Smith, "Legislating Slavery in New Jersey," *Princeton & Slavery Project*, at [slavery.princeton.edu/stories/legislating-slavery-in-new-jersey](http://slavery.princeton.edu/stories/legislating-slavery-in-new-jersey)).

Originally the eastern area of New Jersey established separate courts to try and punish slaves without a jury to handle crimes committed by slaves. Since slaves could not own property, they could not be fined, and to incarcerate a slave would deny his master of his labor, so whipping was a form of punishment. According to local stories passed down through the generations, there was a slave whipping post at the intersection of West Broad Street and Martine Avenue in Scotch Plains.



The Gideon Ross Estate as it appeared around 1850.

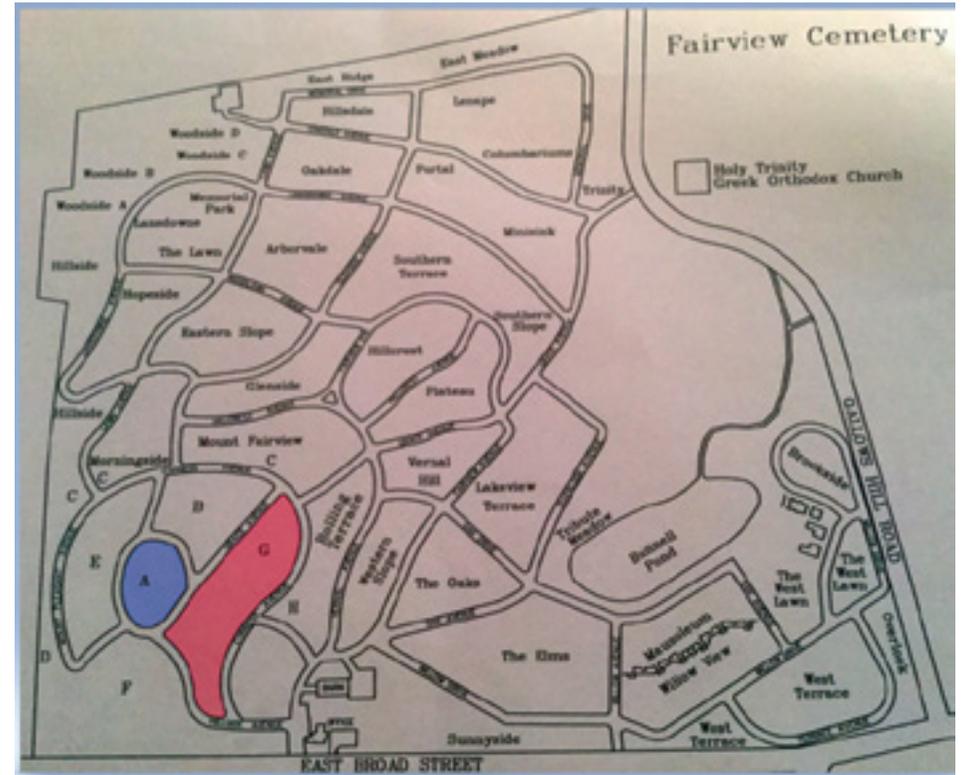
**Site No. 14**  
**Fairview Cemetery –1100 East Broad Street**

When the Burial Grounds of the Presbyterian Church became crowded, Fairview Cemetery was opened in 1868 to afford more burial space. Fairview is notable for its unsegregated burial site of Civil War soldiers and for the plot of an indentured servant buried with the family she served.

One of the families re-interred in the Fairview Cemetery was the Denman family. Their servant, Jude, is buried near them, having died in 1851 at forty-two years of age after 30 years of service. The Denmans inscribed her headstone to “Jude, a faithful and beloved servant.” At the time that Jude lived, the law in New Jersey was that children born of slaves after July 4, 1804 were to be free though they remained servants of the owner of their mother for a specified period (25 years for a man and 21 years for a woman). This enabled owners to continue to appropriate the labor of the children of their slaves. Since Jude was born after the 1804 act, and therefore was born free, she continued as a servant of the Denman household.

Though New Jersey was the last state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, Fairview Cemetery’s Civil War section reflects Westfield’s evolving attitude. The graves of African American Civil War soldiers are buried in Ward G with full honor in a majestic spot along with their white peers. This may be, in part, due to the advocacy of the Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal veterans organization formed in 1866 that was among the first organized advocacy groups supporting voting rights for Black veterans. Mindful of the demonstrated loyalty and sacrifices of the African American soldiers in the Civil War, the Grand Army pushed for honorable burials. Note that most Black soldiers did not receive any pension or remuneration for wounds incurred during the Civil War. The names and lot numbers in Ward G of the African American Civil War soldiers are as follows:

- John Brinkerhoff, died 1911 (age 72), Lot 2
- Milton A. Brown, died 1911 (age 59), Lot 147
- Edmund D. Chamberlain, died 1891 (age 50), Lot 68
- George L. Holland, died 1909 (age 74), Lot 2
- James H. White, died 1929 (age 82), Lot number unavailable



Fairview Cemetery map. Civil War Soldier section in red area, Denman family section in blue area.



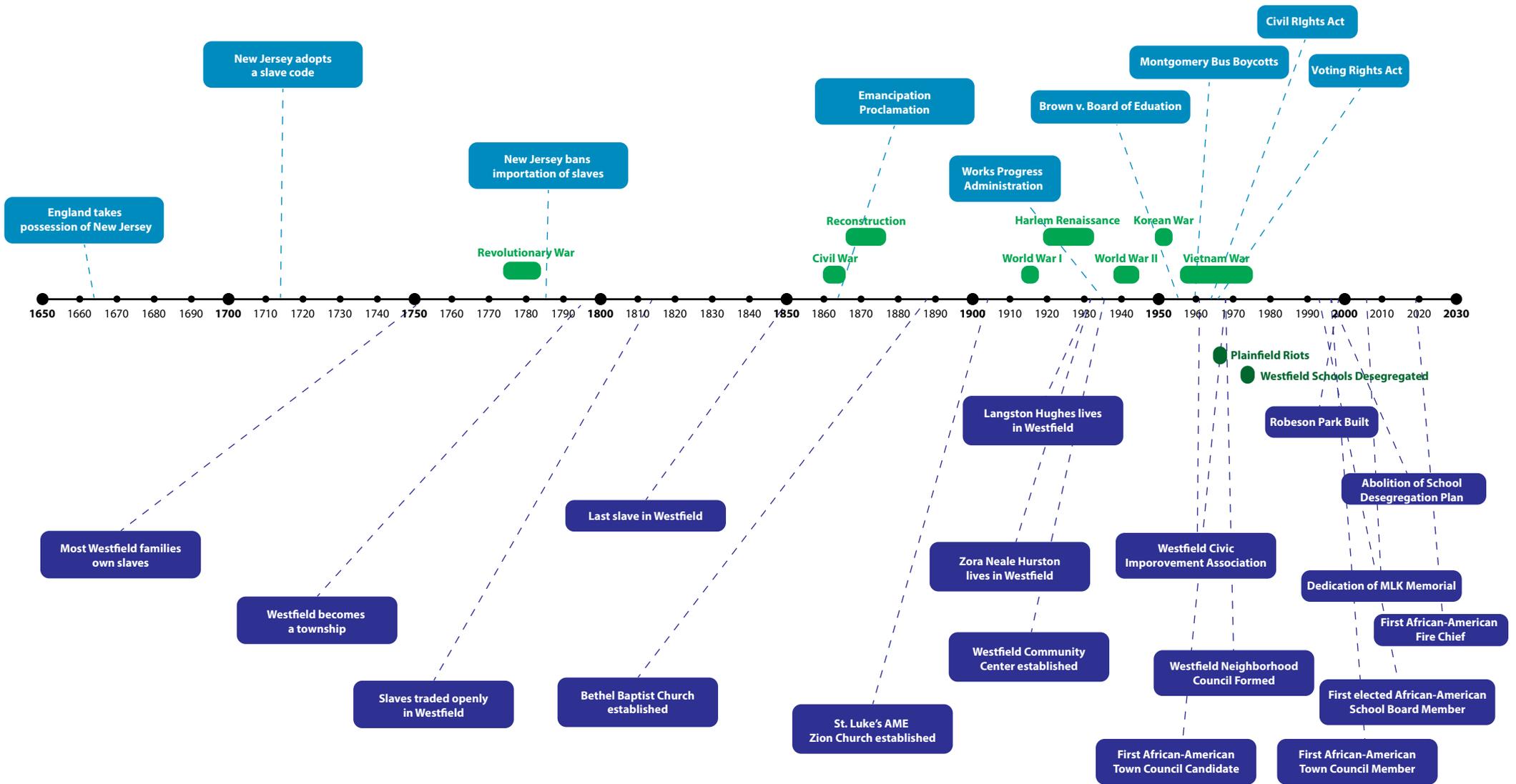
Headstone of George L. Holland, Area G



Headstone of Jude, servant of the Denmans, Area A

# TIMELINE

Note: An interactive version of this timeline, with more in-depth descriptive material, is available at: [time.graphics/line/399475](https://time.graphics/line/399475).



## LIST OF RESOURCES

- African American History in Westfield Walking Tour*, available at: [www.theclio.com/tour/1585](http://www.theclio.com/tour/1585) or on “The Clio” mobile application downloadable from your app store.
- Brown, Lloyd L., *The Young Paul Robeson: On My Journey Now* (Westview Press 1997).
- Colonial Westfield Past and Present*, compiled under the auspices of the Westfield Tercentenary Committee, available as a pdf at: [www.digifind-it.com/westfield/home.php](http://www.digifind-it.com/westfield/home.php) (select: Colonial Westfield Past and Present). [Site No. 1]
- Cooley, Henry Scofield, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey* (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1896). [Site No. 2].
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### ***The Harlem Renaissance***

Spanning the 1920s, Harlem was the cultural and intellectual capital of Black America. Alongside writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay, were musicians like Louis "Pops" Armstrong and Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington, and artists like Aaron Douglas, William H. Johnson, and Meta Warrick Fuller. This period truly represented a highpoint of achievement in American art and culture, an accomplishment the equal of which was not recognized in any other time or place in America. The Harlem Renaissance was a Black American expression reminiscent of the European Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries.

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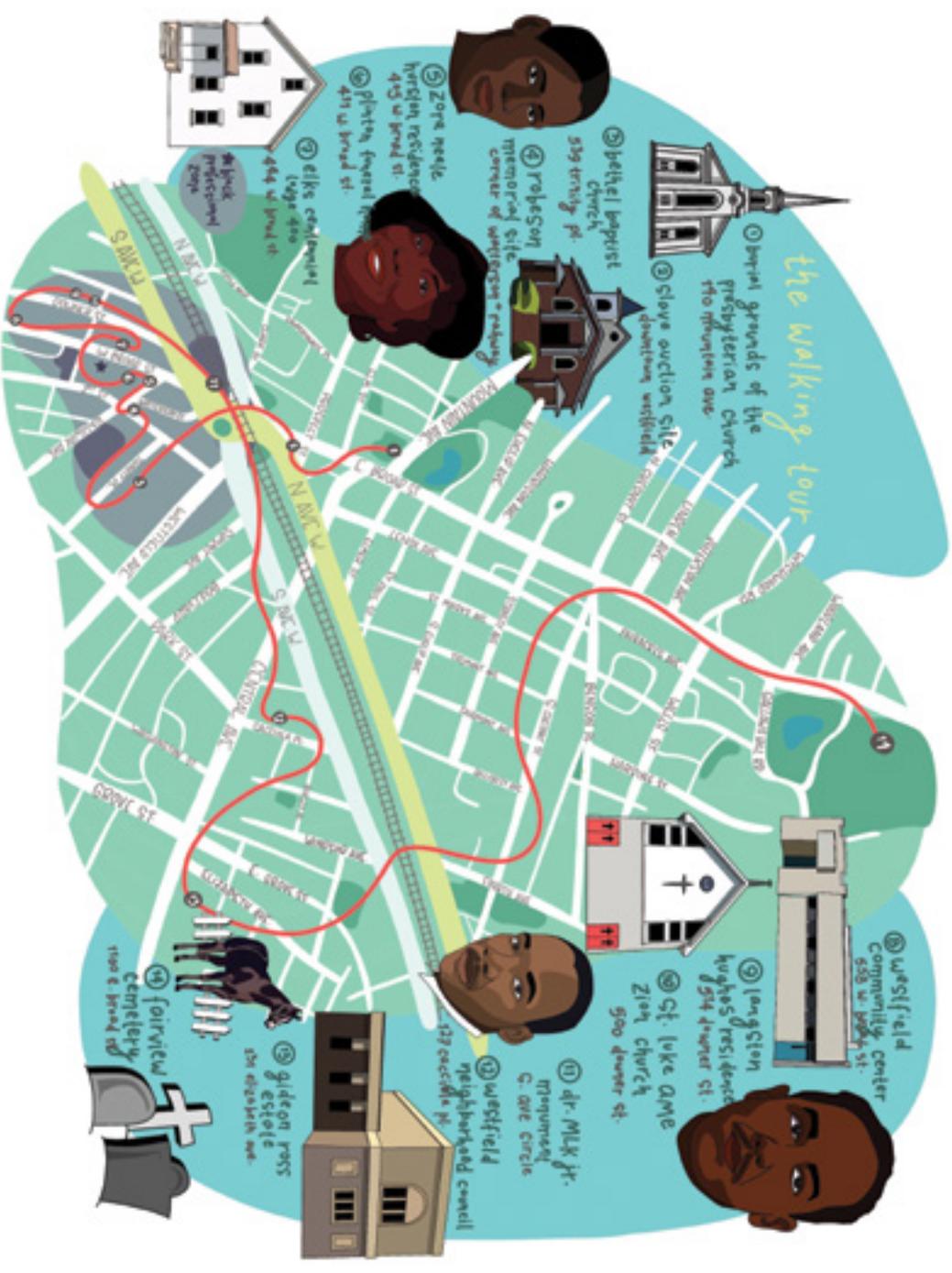
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# the walking tour



1 burial grounds of the  
presbyterian church  
7th mountain ave.



2 slave auction site  
downtown westfield



3 robertson  
memorial site  
corner of westfield parking



4 bellet baptist  
church  
339 trinity pl.

5 zora neale  
hurston residence  
445 w broad st.



6 platina funeral home  
415 w broad st.

7 elks centennial  
league 400  
445 w broad st.

8 black  
professional  
zone

9 westfield  
community center  
858 w. high st.



10 langston  
hughes residence  
854 dummer st.



11 st. luke ome  
ziyah church  
500 dummer st.



12 dr. milk jr.  
monument  
c. ome circle



13 westfield  
neighborhood council  
129 everett pl.



14 glendon ross  
estate  
301 edgemoor ave.



15 fairview  
cemetery  
1100 e. broad st.

